

VZCZCXYZ0001
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHYN #1309/01 2071400
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 261400Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY SANAA
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2350

C O N F I D E N T I A L SANAA 001309

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/ARP AMACDONALD AND INR SMOFFATT

E.O. 12958: DECL: 07/26/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [ECON](#) [YM](#)
SUBJECT: TA'IZ RESIDENTS EXPRESS CONSENSUS ON UNITY AND
CIVIC CONCERNS TO AMBASSADOR

Classified By: Ambassador Stephen Seche for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In his first official visit to Ta'iz on July 22, the Ambassador met with the Governor, the political opposition, civil society leaders, and staff at USAID-grantee al-Jumhuriya Hospital. The Governor and opposition were emphatic about the need to preserve Yemeni unity, while business and NGO representatives bemoaned how poor-quality education contributed to unemployment and intolerance. Ta'iz's status as Yemen's cultural and educational capital was evident in the commitment and creativity of its medical, NGO, and business leaders, who are striving to improve the quality of life for the residents of the governorate. END SUMMARY.

CONSENSUS ON UNITY -----

¶2. (C) In his July 22 meeting with the Ambassador, Ta'iz Governor Hamud Khalid Naji al-Sufi remarked that "there is no doubt that there are grievances, but unity is an untouchable issue," perhaps the only issue on which the government and the opposition are willing to agree. He expressed his belief that resolving the country's economic difficulties would eliminate calls for southern secession. "Change is needed," he said, to eradicate corruption and create a more responsive government, "but unity is a red line." He said that President Saleh's decentralization initiative needs to progress further, but so far the results have been positive. Despite the present challenges, Sufi expressed confidence that "this particular storm will calm down."

¶3. (C) Surprisingly, members of the political opposition delivered much the same message as the ruling party on unity.

The Ambassador began his meeting with local representatives from the opposition Joint Meeting Parties (JMP) by emphasizing USG support for unity and the need for dialogue. The JMP representatives welcomed that message, describing unity as something that the Yemeni people, opposition, and government all agree on. According to Abdulrahman al-Azraki of the Yemeni Socialist Party (YSP), however, "the unity you see now is a unity of oppression." Islah representative Abdulhafidh al-Faqih said that "unity needs pillars" to be sustainable; he described those pillars as democracy, rights, liberties, and equality. "If you are lacking any of these

pillars," he said, "you will be faced with dangers to unity, with a culture of hatred, secession, and marginalization."

IMPROVING HEALTH CARE -----

¶4. (U) The Ambassador visited the maternity ward of al-Jumhuriya Hospital, where a USAID-funded project is training doctors and midwives in maternal and infant care. Because of early and frequent pregnancies (the average Yemeni woman gives birth to 6.3 children), remote populations, and gender roles that discourage women from seeing male medical

staff, infant and maternal mortality rates in Yemen are extremely high. The hospital's Director General Dr. Arwa Bahran remarked that the success of the USAID-funded program is causing more and more expectant mothers to seek care at the hospital.

STRENGTHENING US-YEMENI CULTURAL AND BUSINESS TIES

15. (U) Shawqi Ahmad Ha'il Sa'id, Deputy General Manager of the Ha'il Sa'id An'am Group, hosted a lunch for the Ambassador with local businessmen, almost all of whom had studied in the US. The businessmen discussed daily challenges, including extreme fluctuation in the price of wheat and other foods and the rapidly rising exchange rate. They talked of the need to improve the Yemeni agricultural sector by investing in ways to store and package fruits and vegetables, which would enable Yemeni farmers to export crops and protect themselves from major market fluctuations. They also requested that the USG promote American products more actively in Yemen by sending catalogues and brochures to chambers of commerce so that local businessmen could find out about the various US products that are available.

AN EDUCATION IN HUMAN RIGHTS

16. (U) The Ambassador met with two local NGOs focusing on human rights promotion. At the International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights Center (IHLHRC), Chairman Arif Abdullah al-Makrami said the center's mission is rooted in the fact that "the basis for corruption in third world countries is the people's lack of knowledge of their rights." He described IHLHRC projects to teach Yemeni citizens about their rights

and use this knowledge to fight abuse and corruption. A number of the IHLHRC's projects are carried out in schools, including a MEPI-funded project in 10 secondary schools to start newspapers and video news programs to give students hands-on experience in journalism and freedom of expression. The National Organization for Developing Society (NODS) is a USG grantee founded by moderate imam and Islah Member of Parliament Shawqi al-Qadi. NODS is managed almost entirely by women. Executive Director Misk al-Junaid, Qadi's wife, described NODS's innovative program to engage imams in efforts to embrace democracy, combat religious extremism, and condemn terrorism. She said that NODS targets religious leaders because "one Friday sermon could change the opinion of a thousand people in a week."

POOR EDUCATION SYSTEM

17. (U) Almost all of the Ambassador's interlocutors touched on Yemen's dismal educational system. Governor Sufi described high unemployment, especially among university graduates, as one of the governorate's greatest challenges. According to Sufi, "the product of educational institutions doesn't go hand-in-hand with the demands of the public and private sectors." He recounted how, as Minister of Civil Service, he was given a list of workforce demands by the owner of the Saudi-German Hospital in Sana'a. The then-Minister could not meet those demands. "This is the catastrophe of our education system," he told the Ambassador, noting that Yemeni universities are graduating an abundance of Islamic studies and history majors who are not employable.

Local businessmen also discussed the need to improve the quality of high school, university, and vocational education.

Ha'il Sa'id described how companies who hired university graduates had to invest a lot of money in training them, since their education was generally inadequate. Junaid deplored the fact that "the level of education is deteriorating every day in Yemen," in part due to the economic crisis.

COMMENT

18. (U) The consensus on unity was resounding given Ta'iz's proximity to the southern governorates of Dali' and Lahj. Ta'iz still suffers from severe water shortages, but unlike previous Embassy visits, the Ambassador's interlocutors emphasized other pressing needs such as health care and education. The USG will continue supporting NGOs in Ta'iz that are creatively engaging influential sectors, such as students and imams, and will seek additional ways to improve the quality of education and healthcare for vulnerable sectors. In the long term, a healthy and educated society will be the basis for a more stable and prosperous Yemen.
END COMMENT.
SECHE